

Other Things that Burn by Luddleston

Category: The Witcher (TV), Wiedźmin | The Witcher - All Media Types

Genre: Alcohol, Character Study, Exes, Humor, Jaskier is dramatic, M/M, Post-Break Up, Song: Burn Butcher Burn (The Witcher), minor spoilers for s2, post S1 but pre S2, the bartender is done with him

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Summary:

Jaskier in Oxenfurt, in his creative processes, in his feelings.

Or: during a conversation with a local bartender about relationships he would like to set on fire so that he can rise from their ashes like a triumphant and glorious phoenix, Jaskier becomes inspired to write the break-up song of the century.

Other Things that Burn

Author's Note:

I'm back!

This contains brief references to [Things that keep you up at night](#) but it's not necessary to read, that's just my personal HC on Jaskier and Geralt's first kiss, which of course is necessary for Jaskier to reflect upon in his Sad Boy Hours.

NOTE: I have only watched through ep 4 of S2! I didn't think this needed further context though so hopefully I don't have to make edits later, but I'm watching it slowly!

The bar was an absolute shithole on the outer edges of Oxenfurt, with cheap, if watered-down drinks, and not a lot of traffic from those hoity-toity merchant types who liked the sorts of establishments where they could meet other merchants' sons and daughters who thought they were *artistes* and then call themselves erudite for having rubbed shoulders with a *creative*. And, it seemed to be open all hours. This meant the place was frequented mostly by students.

At the start of term, many of the new students of musical study—and plenty of other disciplines, Jaskier liked to think he was cross-disciplinarily relevant—recognized him and were struck with awe at the idea of seeing a famed alumnae of their university in their own local tavern. They would crowd around, ask for stories and songs, and he would gladly give them, along with a cheeky reminder that he *was* teaching a seminar, if they wanted to learn more, and a quick word of advice not to over-drink before exams. As if Jaskier had never attended lessons blind drunk with a bottle of vodka hidden behind the weighty geography text he definitely had not been studying the night prior.

Later on in the year, those students all realized Jaskier was a sad-sack who was *still*, despite all the women—and men—and people who were neither women nor men, taken with the Witcher from Rivia.

"Have I told you what he said to me on that mountaintop?" he would ask.

"Yes, Jaskier, you have told us," they would say, *"several times, in fact."*

It was after one such occasion that found himself sitting at the bar, not moping (because moping is for people who are not bards, you see, Jaskier was *brooding*) and he found the bartender giving him a long, concerned look. Oh, it was like a story, or like a *song*, maybe, one in which all the bartenders were middle-aged gentlemen with a healthy amount of facial hair and worried brows, and they listened to their patrons' woes all night long before going home and wishing they had somebody to listen to their own—

But he digressed.

"All right there, friend?" the bartender asked, in a low tone, soft enough that it won't carry across the tavern as he advised his customer—this would make a good ballad, actually.

"Well, I am sure if you have a good ear you heard that conversation," Jaskier said. The students he had been talking to had wandered off to a corner of the bar which didn't have enough seats for the lot of them, but one of the girls had taken a seat on a boy's lap. Good for him. "I'm well-aware of my own faults, here, but it is as if every time I talk to someone, my words turn to him." This was an issue that had become worse of late, possibly because Jaskier was once again jilted by somebody who said she didn't want to come second to an old flame in his heart.

Second to an old flame.

The wording was brilliant, at least. He was going to borrow that.

"Aye," said the bartender, pulling out a rag and wiping down a mug. He really was the picture of a classic barkeep. "More than once I have heard such talk, bard. Mlecze, was it?"

"Jaskier," he corrected. Wrong flower, right color. Though he was sure he looked like no 'buttercup' at the moment. "And your name, my good sir?"

"Ginger."

"I thought that was his name." Jaskier indicated the enormous orange cat who sat behind the bar, perched between bottles of liquor and looking disdainfully with judgmental pumpkin-colored eyes at anybody who entered.

"No, he's Tom."

"I thought that was your name." To Jaskier's credit, the barkeep looked more like a 'Tom' than a 'Ginger'. His hair was black, nothing ginger about him. Mayhaps he was particularly spicy.

"You would not be the first to mix us up." Ginger finished up with his mug and went to the next one. It was late in the evening, the group of students were the only patrons aside from Jaskier himself. A good hour for slowly wiping down mugs. "Listen, would you like my advice about your witcher?"

"More than anything," Jaskier said eagerly. "I would also like another drink, if you don't mind."

He just gave Jaskier the bottle, which seemed prudent. Jaskier was perfectly capable of pouring himself another. And another, and another.

"My suggestion is that you turn this talk into a song. If it's catchy enough, people will want to listen to your troubles."

"Oh, that would be a piece of work," Jaskier said. He decided he liked this particular vodka. It tasted like nothing at all. He could drink it as long as he wanted.

Tom the ginger-cat hopped down from his perch and wandered off in search of any mice who might have snuck into the tavern. Ginger, the not-a-cat, said, "exactly. Songs about heartbreak are very popular. They catch on, after so many people take them to heart and belt them out next somebody breaks *their* heart."

Jaskier looked at the candle behind the bar. It was a good candle, big and fat, with a steady flame and a mirror behind it to reflect the light to the whole room. It was dripping wax onto the counter below it, but judging by the multi-colored spatter of wax from candles once gone before, this was a common occurrence.

"What would you tell him, if you could?" Ginger asked, and Jaskier realized he had been silent long enough that Ginger assumed he had gone all melancholy and wordless.

To be fair, he'd gone all melancholy and wordless.

"I don't know, honestly. I used to think I'd ask him why. I used to wish he'd come running to me, wherever I was, apologies on his lips, down on one knee to beg my forgiveness. But Geralt isn't exactly a 'mea culpa' type."

What would he say to Geralt, If the White Wolf himself, the Butcher of Blaviken (although he'd told Jaskier he didn't want to hear that title and Jaskier had so graciously stricken it from his repertoire) walked straight in that door? Jaskier bet Geralt would look at him without an ounce of contrition, his eyes as yellow as the candle-flame. He'd probably see Jaskier and turn right around, the big dumb bastard. That complete and utter *ass*. He dared to make Jaskier fall so hard for him, and then, what? He just... broke it all down and left? Burned it all down and left Jaskier's heart an arson investigation?

Geralt could have found Jaskier by now if he wanted. Jaskier wasn't a difficult man to track down, especially not with his reputation climbing by the day. This meant Geralt was purposefully refusing to seek him out.

"You know, sad songs are good, but you look more angry than anything," Ginger said. "I'll not pretend to know anything about music, just as you ought not to pretend you know anything about alcohol besides how to drink it, but I do love that song about the woman breaking apart her cheating husband's carriage wheels with a club."

Jaskier knows which one he's talking about. It's a right masterpiece. "I *am* angry," he said. But he'd kept that anger tight to his chest, wanting to pull it

out only when he was really lonely, because Geralt may not have been there for him, but his anger at Geralt always was. "Perhaps it is time to release that fury."

"So, what would you tell him, if you saw him?"

Jaskier was always thinking about what Geralt would say to *him*, not the other way 'round. Apologies, explanations, pleas for his forgiveness, even if he said nothing, Jaskier had planned for it.

He'd never imagined what would happen if *he* was the one to encounter *Geralt* first. And of course it was damn well not likely Jaskier would simply let Geralt wander through the crowd without walking up to him, spinning him so they're face to face (in this mental picture, Jaskier was capable of spinning Geralt 'round) and giving him what for.

"I'd tell him..."

He stared into the candle again, flickering.

"I'd tell him to *burn*."

That anger, which he only pressed down on occasionally, bubbled in him, his pain congealing to fury.

"I'd tell him, *burn, Butcher, burn*—" It felt wrathfully good to spit the title Geralt most abhorred. "I'd tell him I'll burn every memory we made together."

The two of them tied together, back to back working together instead of against one another, for the first time. Up in flames.

Jaskier begging Geralt to be at his side on his journey to Cintra, chamomile oil and perfumed water. "*And yet, here we are.*" Torched.

Fitting into a too-small bed beside him in a tavern, watching Geralt heal from new wounds and listening to him confess, in the dark, that no witcher died in his bed. Ash and smoke.

Geralt nuzzling at his wrist, breathing him in. Geralt laying on his back and letting Jaskier lean over him, baring himself for a kiss. Geralt's mouth on his, the slow plot of his pulse under Jaskier's hand. Four times slower than an ordinary man's—

Geralt *shouting him down like Jaskier meant nothing at all to him*. Burn it all!

Jaskier would burn! It! All!

And from that smoke, Jaskier would rise, like a magnificent phoenix—

He stood, slowly and triumphantly raised his drink. "Tom! I must go get my lute!"

"He's Tom, I'm not," Ginger corrected him. "And pay your tab first."

"Good sir, you would not make me stop in the tracks of *inspiration* to worry about such meager concerns as—"

"Pay. Your. Tab."

Right.

Jaskier paid his tab.

And *then* Jaskier became the rising phoenix out of the ash of the Witcher's fiery words burning everything within Jaskier's heart until it was charcoal.

He only cried a little, the first time he performed it.

Author's Note:

Hopefully my google translate Polish joke about Jaskier's name isn't too terrible! Ginger is, naturally, asking if his name is Dandelion. And hopefully my joke about Fantasy Kelly Clarkson is also not too terrible--eh, that's too much to ask for, it's pretty terrible.

Tom the Cat and Ginger the Not-Cat are my two favorite new witcher OCs.

Find me on Twitter [@luddlestons](https://twitter.com/luddlestons) where I talk some about the Witcher, and a lot about the Iliad.